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ABSTRACT

This document reports the results of two standardized instruments, the Survey of College Achievement (SCA) and the Omnibus Personality Inventory (OPI), as they were administered to a group of students at Empire State College in the fall 1971. The first ESC students appear to be, as a group, fairly independent with a well developed sense of self-value according to OPI analysis. The group's SCA scores for the social sciences, history and humanities sections are higher than for the English composition, mathematics, and natural science sections. Several questions for ESC raised by both sets of findings are discussed. (Author/HS)

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ABSTRACT OF RESEARCH & REVIEW
No. 6

A REPORT ON THE ESC TESTING PROGRAM

by

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John McCormick

Reports results of two standardized instruments (Survey of College Achievement (SCA) published by ETS, and Omnibus Personality Inventory (OPI) published by the Psychological Corporation) administered to the initial groups of students at Empire State College in the fall, 1971. The first ESC students appear to be, as a group, fairly independent with a well developed sense of self-value according to OPI analysis. The incoming groups SCA scores for the social science-history and humanities sections are higher than for the English composition, mathematics, and natural science sections. Several questions for ESC raised by both sets of findings are discussed.

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EDITOR'S NOTE: The following report was prepared jointly by A. Paul Bradley and Ernest G. Palola, Office of Research and Evaluation, and John McCormick, Office of Academic Affairs

A REPORT ON THE ESC TESTING PROGRAM

It is useful to know what characterizes an ESC student in order to plan and develop such things as the staff of regional learning centers, the organization of the college, and self-study learning resource modules. In order to learn more about students, three instruments were administered to the initial enrollees at the Northeast and Genesee Valley Learning Centers. The instruments chosen were the American Council on Education's Student Information Form (SIF) which is a biographical inventory, the Omnibus Personality Inventory (OPI) which examines personality characteristics, and the Survey of College Achievement (SCA) which measures group academic achievement.

Student Information Form -- Though several SIF items have questionable relevance at Empire State College, the instrument did provide some useful information about the first students: academic aspirations; primary academic interests; career aspirations; likelihood of changing colleges, majors, careers, etc.; need for tutoring; concern for success or failure; likelihood of graduating from ESC; reasons for attending college; views of desirable college characteristics; perceived academic skills; and reasons for attending Empire State College. Issues #1 and 2 of Research and Review reported these findings.

Omnibus Personality Inventory -- The OPI (published by the Psychological Corporation) assesses selected student attitudes, values, and interests pertinent to academic activity or normal ego-functioning. It may take a student ninety minutes or more to complete, and, like most personality instruments, asks some questions in sensitive areas. Analyses of student responses to OPI questions creates a profile with 14 scales:

1. Thinking Introversion - liking for reflective thought and academic activities

2. Theoretical Orientation - preference for dealing with theoretical concerns and problems and for using the scientific method of thinking

3. Aestheticism - interest in artistic matters and activities

4. Complexity - the capacity to deal with ambiguity

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5. Autonomy - need for independence

6. Religious Orientation - the degree of commitment to Judaic-Christian beliefs

7. Social Extroversion - the degree of a person's interest in being with other people

8. Impulse Expression - the activity of a person's imagination

9. Personal Integration - degree of social alienation

10. Anxiety Level - degree of nervousness at new encounters

11. Altruism - degree of concern for others

12. Practical Outlook - interest in practical activities and material possessions

13. Masculinity-Femininity - inclination toward ideas and activities usually associated with a single gender

14. Response Bias - the respondent's test-taking attitude

OPI scoring also creates an Intellectual Disposition Category, a synthesis of the six scales deemed most useful for identifying persons inclined toward scholarly activity.

The OPI respondent group for Empire State College exhibits several patterns. The group is especially characterized by a strong tendency toward independence from authority and a well-developed sense of self-value. Both characteristics are typical of mature adults. Another strong characteristic of the group is its general disinterest in material possessions. A possible interpretation of this is that the typical ESC student is interested in learning for learning's sake and not merely to qualify for a better paying job. Other pronounced ESC group characteristics include a liking for reflective thought in a variety of areas such as literature, art, and philosophy and interest in artistic activities. Some moderate characteristics include an experimental and flexible orientation rather than a fixed way of viewing phenomena, some skepticism toward conventional religious beliefs, a fairly low level of anxiety toward new experiences, and a concern for the feelings of others. Interpretation of the relatively new Intellectual Disposition Category for the ESC sample group is difficult, but ESC students appear to be distributed fairly normally.

The OPI results for the initial ESC students are intriguing from at least two standpoints. First, some felt that Empire State College might attract students interested only in obtaining a degree for its monetary value. Since the Practical Outlook scale is the lowest mean of the fourteen, the OPI results indicate that students have other strong motivations for pursuing studies. Second, Empire State's unstructured curriculum seems designed for self-disciplined, mature students. The OPI results seem to indicate that these traits are prominent in the sample group.

Survey of College Achievement -- The SCA is designed to measure group academic achievement in English composition, humanities, mathematics, natural sciences, and social sciences-history. Since each of these batteries takes only fifteen minutes and contains a small number of items, the instrument is less demanding and therefore more administratively convenient than most other achievement instruments available on the market. However, the SCA is not designed to yield valid data on individual students -- just groups. Thus, the test results will not help a mentor in counseling an individual student.

The Educational Testing Service, publisher of SCA, claims that the SCA has research applicability for helping determine achievement of a particular class, growth or change in the achievement of student groups, needs for curricular reform, student's achievement in the major fields, the effectiveness of new programs, and other dimensions by using SCA results as a control variable. Empire State used the SCA only for measuring the achievement of a particular group, the first ESC students.

The group of students who took the Survey of College Achievement showed fairly high achievement in the humanities and social sciences-history but scored lower in English composition, mathematics, and natural science. This pattern is perhaps partially explained by responses to two items on the SIF and reported in Research and Review #1: almost all of the initial students expected to concentrate in the humanities and social sciences and many planned careers in service occupations (e.g. teacher, social worker, nurse). High academic achievement in an area often correlates highly with student interests. More important, however, the results raise some broad questions for the College: What should an Empire State College degree mean in terms of academic achievement? Should the degree denote students with a well-developed speciality? Should the degree denote well-rounded persons with varied academic skills? Are students' strengths and weaknesses influencing the kinds of liberal studies the College is trying to provide? Are a large number of ESC students, as the pattern of the test indicates, weak in the basic skills of spelling, grammar, and punctuation? Is it the College's responsibility to correct these deficiencies? What is the place of natural science and math in this institution? Should non-science majors be advised to do a component in the natural sciences? Are the learning contracts capitalizing on the students' apparent strength in humanities and social sciences?

Other Investigations -- As part of ESC's general research effort, a study of some of the College's first graduates is now under way. This examination of "finishers" involves lengthy interviews about all facets of a student's experience at Empire State. In addition, we are talking with mentors about their views of the "finishers" and the College. In the design stage is research on ESC students from entrance to graduation. For this study, the research and evaluation staff is considering several methodological techniques including content analysis of students' daily journals and taking a qualitative look at contracts and evaluations.

This is the beginning of an important and interesting effort. Subsequent issues of Research and Review will report on our progress.